



## Hope's artistic work sprang from Hebrides photographs

By Katie Macleod

Anyone with even a passing interest in the Scottish islands will have come across Hope Blamire's oil paintings, photos of which have garnered her more than 50,000 followers on social media. Her art is immediately recognisable: swirling blues of sea and sky, soft pops of colour depicting machair flowers, and the sweeps of white sand that the west coast is known for.

Hope grew up in Ayrshire and Argyll – she has always felt a connection to the sea and the coast – but it wasn't until she was in her twenties, having returned from living in Africa, that she spent a week visiting the Outer Hebrides and fell in love with the islands. What she didn't know then was that the visit had planted the seed for her future full-time art career.

"I always had these photographs from that time, popping out of drawers," she remembers. "About nine or ten years ago I painted from one of those photographs, a small beach painting, and my husband Rupert said to me: 'That's what you should do, you should paint the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.'"

That's exactly what she did: Hope started exhibiting and





selling her “Scottish seascape” paintings at art galleries, while continuing to work as a teacher in Bath, where she lives with her family, and everything “snowballed” from there. It was after that initial beach painting that Hope returned to the Outer Hebrides, and she’s been going back to the Scottish islands ever since. “I really could not stop going back, it became an obsession,” she says.

Ten years on, and Hope has developed close links with the islands, making friends and regularly hosting fundraisers for island charities. Her latest art venture has taken her back to the Outer Hebrides even more often, with the opening of a new shop, “Blamire at Harris,” in Tarbert in March 2022. The shop stocks both her paintings and her husband Rupert’s ceramics (gin fans will recognise his name from the limited-edition Harris Gin Cèilidh Bottles he designs for the Isle of Harris Distillery), and the experience has been “really special” for them. “We’ve had huge support from locals in both Harris and Lewis. Something I find incredibly uplifting and heart-warming as a visitor is that we’ve always been made to feel very welcome in the islands.”

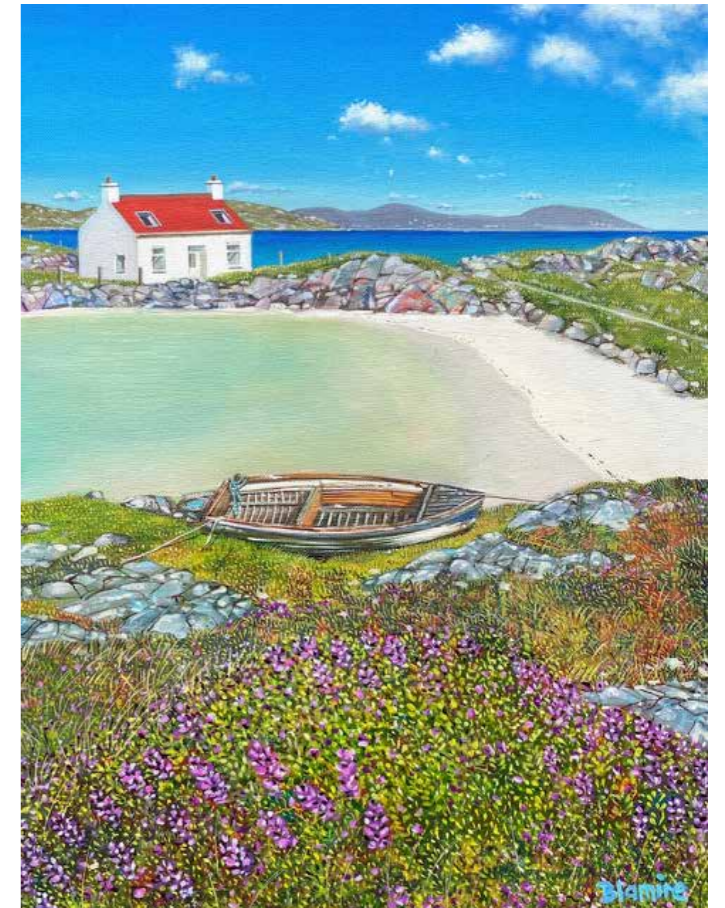
Whether she’s on a solo work trip to the west coast islands or on family holidays, Hope admits that “the camera’s never down, because everywhere I look is a painting. I’m inspired by everything, and I think that’s how artists or creative people typically feel, you’re inspired by your surroundings – especially somewhere that you love like that.”



With more than 300,000 photos on her phone, Hope has plenty inspiration to choose from when she’s back at home in her studio. She quit her teaching job in 2017 to become a full-time artist, and these days she works mostly on commission, with the paintings drawn from her own photographs of the islands. If someone requests a painting of a certain island location, Hope sends through a selection of photographs for them to choose from, although the final painting is never an exact replica. She asks clients for their preference in terms of style: “Do they want it to be stormy? Or do they want to have blue skies? This angle, or that angle? And then I keep them updated as I go along.”

She holds up a painting-in-progress, of Northton in Harris, as she explains her process. “I’ve got this one drying at the moment, so for this one, for example, I would put in the base layer of blue – blue sky and blue sea – let that dry overnight, and then work back into it the next day.” She explains that artists who work with oil paints, like she does, tend to have a few paintings on the go at once, as they wait for each one to dry before returning to it.

Art has always been part of her life: Hope spent her childhood “drawing, colouring, and painting,” and her primary school teacher Mrs. Faulds even told her parents that she’d be an artist one day. Mrs. Faulds was right, as Hope graduated in 1988 with a degree in Illustration and Printmaking from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee. Before she came to her island beach paintings, Hope was doing linocuts and prints of cities around the UK, and during her time in Africa, she found herself painting the local animals and her surroundings.





"I've always been more design-led than fine-art led, so illustration was always there. I feel as I'm almost illustrating the islands in a way, with paint," says Hope. That early illustration background comes to the fore in her work for the Isle of Cumbrae Distillers, whose Maura Gin bottle label she designed, and her own candle "Siar," which sold out after its limited-edition release in 2022. Hope created the candle "to be reminiscent of the west coast of Scotland, when the weather's good, and the machair flowers are out on a warm day, and you get out of the car and you get that feeling of contentment and happiness."

Both design projects reflect the vibrant coastal colours her oil paintings are known for, and when it comes to the islands themselves, Hope enjoys visiting them all for different reasons. With friends in North Uist and Harris, she spends time there often, but adds that Barra in particular feels "very special" to her. "I always feel really at peace and I like being on my own there... Then there's Lewis, which in my opinion has just as good beaches as Harris. And I love Mull, it's got everything, and it's just five minutes across the water to Iona... I love them all."

